

Grain Sorghum Trials Underway in Leb. Co.

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Grain Sorghum is fast becoming an important agricultural crop in Lebanon County. Acreage planted to grain sorghum in 1973 is estimated at around 1000 acres in Lebanon County. Most of the sorghum is planted in the northern part of the county, in the shale type soils.

Increased interest in growing sorghum for grain has led to the development of many hybrid strains or varieties in a Variety Test Plot next to the Lebanon Valley Livestock Market, along Route 22. These variety plots will be identified, and can be inspected by local farmers at any time. Similar variety plots last

year on the farm of Paul Flinchbaugh, Lebanon, produced an average yield of 114 bushels of grain per acre. This compared very favorably with corn yields on the same type of soil.

Corn grown on shale soils is easily damaged by drought. Water retention in this soil is very low, even under high fertility. Grain sorghum has the ability to recover from drought damage and produce an acceptable yield in a year when corn may fail.

For this reason, many producers whose soil is predominantly shale, have turned to growing grain sorghum instead of corn for grain. Corn is still the better crop for silage, however.

As with hybrid corn, grain

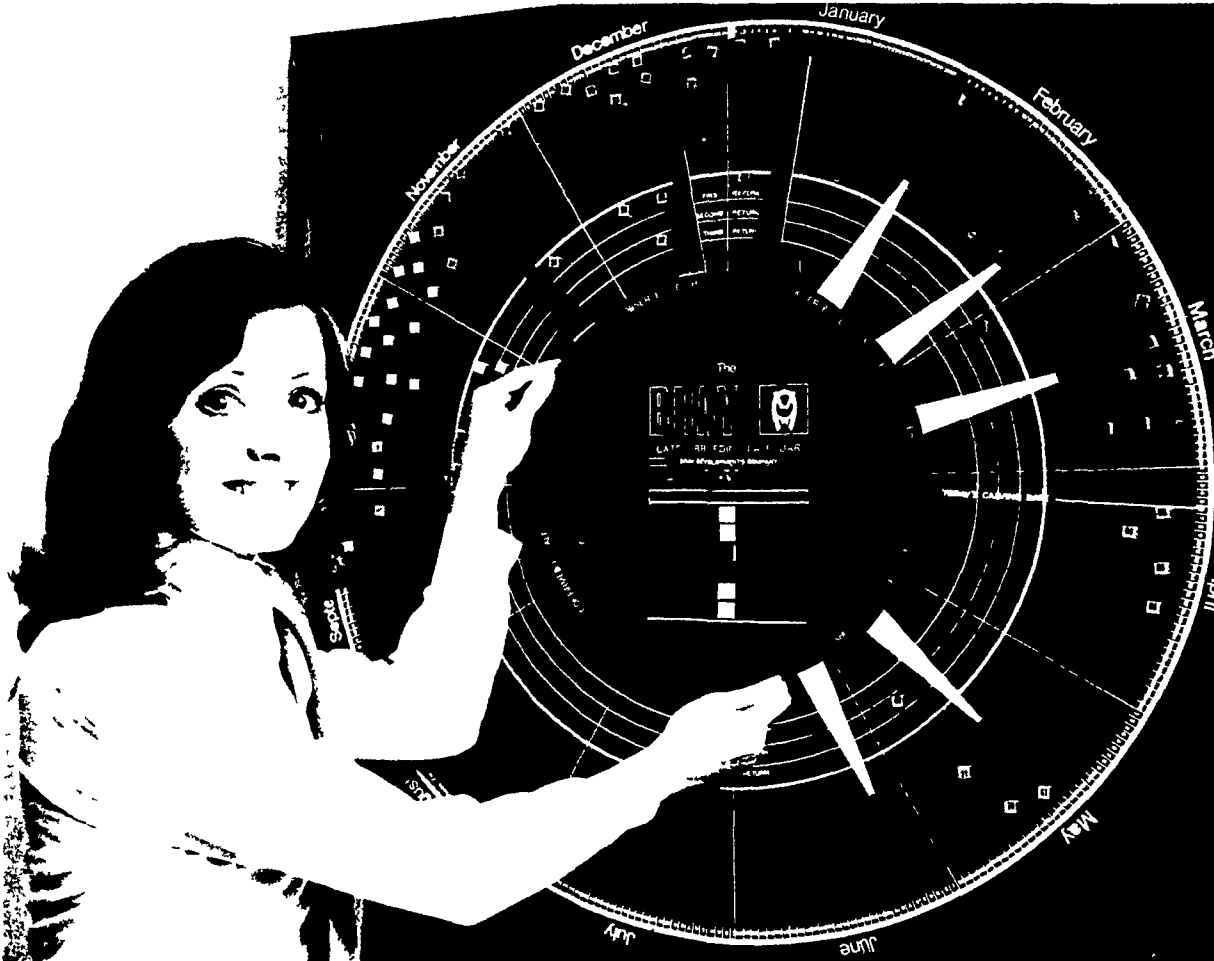
sorghum varieties are bred for certain desirable characteristics. Length of growing season may vary from 100 days to 140 days, so varieties may be chosen to fit the time of maturity to the seasonal conditions. Hybrids vary in head type, some being very compact in the seed head, while others are open and quite loose. An important quality in some growing areas is resistance to bird damage. Bird resistant varieties are high in tannic acid at ripening time, making the seed distasteful to the birds. The tannic acid is dissipated when the grain is stored for a few weeks, and the grain is again palatable and can be used for feed — even as bird seed.

Grain Sorghum types which display all of the different characteristics are included in the Lebanon County plots. They will be harvested separately when ripe, and yield will be tabulated and published. Local growers can use this information to select the hybrid best suited to their needs and conditions.

Harvesting of the grain sorghum variety plots will be done with a combine, but the yields will be tabulated using a hand harvest method. Three replicated plots of one 500th of an acre each, are weighed and sampled for moisture content. Newton Bair, Assistant Lebanon County Agent, is in charge of the plots, and will supervise the harvest. The plots were planted with the cooperation of Delmas Hernley, who leases the land. Several FFA members from the Norlebo Vocational Agricultural Department also helped in the planting, and will assist in the harvest.

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